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Reagan Pledges U.S. Flexibility In Soviet Talks

Queries on Star Wars Plan Indicate Sensitive Times Lie Ahead for Program

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WASHINGTON—Basking in the glow of this week's agreement to resume arms talks, President Reagan said the U.S. will be "flexible, patient and determined" in dealing with the Soviet Union.

Mr. Reagan faced a barrage of questions about his controversial "Star Wars" program during last night's news conference. The questions were indicative of the political problems that lie ahead for his administration as it tries to develop new space-based weapons at the same time it negotiates with the Soviets about banning them.

Mr. Reagan said that U.S. plans for space weapons "will be on the table, with everything else" in the new round of negotiations. But his comment didn't appear to change the administration's position that its plans for space-based defensive weapons will be a subject for discussion with the Soviets—not a bargaining chip to be traded away.

The success of this week's meeting with the Soviets in Geneva, Switzerland, is a major political victory for Mr. Reagan and one of the most important foreign-policy successes of his presidency. The outcome appears to validate his argument that by pressing ahead with its weapon buildup, including the Star Wars program, the U.S. can pressure the Soviets to return to the bargaining table.

Mr. Reagan praised Secretary of State George Shultz and his negotiating team who met with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, calling their work "American diplomacy at its best." Mr. Reagan even had some kind words for the U.S.-Soviet detente, an idea he once scorned, saying: "We'd welcome such a thing as long as it was a two-way street."

Mr. Reagan also offered the strongest statement yet that the administration intends to remain within the limits of the unratified SALT II treaty when that agreement expires this year. "We feel we can live within it," he said of the SALT limits, indicating that the U.S. will retire some missile-carrying nuclear submarines this year to stay within the accord's limits.

Under the agreement announced late Tuesday in Geneva, the U.S. and Soviets will resume the negotiations that were suspended 13 months ago over strategic and

intermediate-range missiles; they also will open a round of talks on space and defensive weapons. The site and date of the talks will be announced within the next month.

The leading candidate to head the U.S. delegation to the new talks, according to one senior administration official, is Max Kampelman, a Washington attorney. Mr. Kampelman, a conservative Democrat who represented the U.S. at human rights talks in Madrid, is adept at domestic politics as well as diplomacy. Thus, he could help Mr. Reagan in the difficult job of lobbying Congress to support the administration's policies on defense and arms control.

Asked about Central America, Mr. Reagan suggested that he would push for resumed congressional financing of the Central Intelligence Agency's covert operations in Nicaragua. Congress last fall cut off aid to Nicaraguan insurgents who are battling Managua's leftist government, but allowed the administration to seek resumed aid after Feb. 28. Mr. Reagan stressed that he would continue "to support the people of Nicaragua," who, he said, "are governed by a group that took over by force."